



Improving WASH Service Delivery in Small Towns: Systems Approach Implemented in Ethiopia

SUMMARY

There are several initiatives involved in improving WASH service provision in small towns in Ethiopia, of which some have taken a systems approach. These include the ONEWASH Plus programme, applying an integrated climate-resilient WASH approach, the Sustainable WASH Systems Learning Partnership, applying a Learning Alliance approach for improving small town sanitation, and UNICEF model of utility service provision to both refugees and host communities. Systems approaches are ongoing processes which take time and require multiple levels of action, both at local as well as at regional and national level.

Introduction

UNICEF, IRC WASH and the Water Development Commission of the Ministry of Water, Irrigation and Energy held a face-to-face / online symposium on “Climate-resilient systems approaches for small town WASH services in Ethiopia” on 3 December 2020. The objective of this symposium was for sector stakeholders 1) to learn and share on small town WASH, with a focus on systems strengthening and climate resilient approaches, and 2) to identify innovations for scaling up and agree on specific areas that need more lobby and advocacy.

Ethiopia is a mostly rural country but is undergoing rapid urbanisation. While Central

Statistical Agency (CSA)¹ projected that in 2020 almost 80% of the population would still be living in settlements with fewer than 2000 people, there has been considerable urban growth. Other reports have argued that Ethiopian cities with fewer than 300 000 inhabitants will account for more than 60% of urban population growth between 2015 and 2035².

The number of small and medium towns³ has increased considerably over the last decades, as illustrated in Figure 1. These small and medium towns are considered strategic due to rapid population growth and their importance as centres of local business and growth within their rural hinterlands. However, ensuring the provision of sustainable WASH services in these towns has

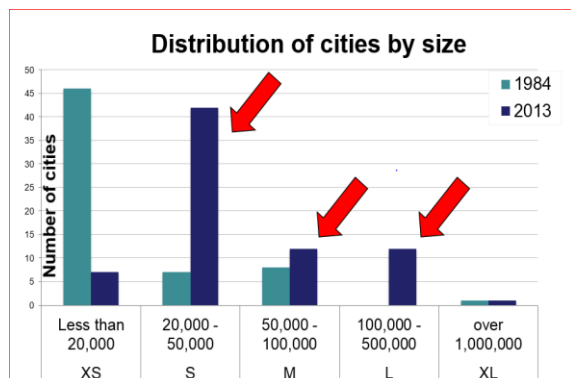
¹ Central Statistical Agency. 2013. Population Projections for Ethiopia 2007-2037

² Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 2020. *Rural Development Strategy Review of Ethiopia. Reaping the benefits of Urbanisation*. [Accessed January 2021 <https://doi.org/10.1787/a325a658-en>]

³ The Ethiopian Growth and Transformation Plan II defines five town categories: Category 1 to 5 with respectively populations of more than 1 million people; 100,000 to 1 million; 50,000 to 100,000; 20,000 to 50,000; and less than 50,000 people. In this paper we consider medium and small towns in category 3-5.

been a challenge. This is mainly due to low institutional capacities, low economies of scale, cost recovery challenges, and high population growth and increasing demand for WASH services. For a long time, limited attention was given to WASH in smaller towns compared to bigger urban areas.

Figure 1: Small-medium towns in Ethiopia



Over the last decade, a number of initiatives have focused on improving WASH in small towns. These have included among others UNICEF's ONEWASH Plus Programme, WaterAid Ethiopia's 20 Towns Capacity Development Project, World Bank's support activities to the One WaSH National Programme (ONWP), and the USAID-funded Sustainable WASH Systems (SWS) learning partnership led by TetraTech and IRC WASH in Ethiopia.

Implementation models for small town WASH

The session of the Symposium focusing on implementation approaches for small town WASH in Ethiopia, brought together experiences from the ONEWASH Plus programme (Box 1), with a case study from Welenchiti Town Water Utility, the SWS Learning Partnership (Box 2), and the Itang Town Water Utility (Box 3).

Recordings of the three presentations are available on: www.ircwash.org/news/symposium-small-town-wash-services-ethiopia or <https://www.unicef.org/ethiopia/stories/symposium-climate-resilient-systems-approaches>

BOX 1.

THE ONEWASH PLUS APPROACH

Key approaches developed and applied under the ONEWASH Plus programme included 1) the Integrated Service Delivery Model, 2) climate resilient approach, and 3) the Build-Capacity Build – Transfer (BCBT) approach.

The **integrated service delivery approach** applied under the ONEWASH Plus programme includes all WASH sub-sectors (water supply, sanitation and hygiene, solid waste and liquid/faecal sludge management and institutional WASH). It involves engagement of different stakeholders, including utilities, (local) government, private sector and citizens. And it involves both hardware (e.g. construction of the piped scheme and construction of sludge treatment sites) and software activities (e.g. Community Led Total Sanitation triggering, capacity building through trainings, as well as through the Open University modules on small town WASH developed within the programme). Through this integrated approach, the project managed to address multiple challenges of WASH service provision in the towns in a holistic way.

The programme addressed **climate resilience** by linking town systems to satellite villages, supporting development and implementation of watershed conservation plans, and by focusing on climate-resilient water sources.

The BCBT approach is an innovative contracting model. It is a localized version of the build-operate-transfer model, in line with the local institutional context, which restricts the role of the private sector in public service provision. Under BCBT, ownership of assets remains with the town water utility (TWU), with a private entity supporting and strengthening the TWU through on-the-job training, mentoring and coaching during the construction or rehabilitation phase. Contracting of several services such as drilling works, civil works, pipe laying and provision of equipment are packaged under one contract with a skills transfer component.

BOX 2.

THE WELENCHITI EXPERIENCE

The ONEWASH Plus programme has contributed to hard- and software improvements related to WASH in Welenchiti. The capacity building component under the ONEWASH Plus programme included the establishment of a better financial management system and computerized billing system and training on internal and external accountability. As a result, financial management and accountability have improved.

The integrated approach applied under the ONEWASH Plus programme increased collaboration and coordination between the Welenchiti Town Water Utility (TWU) and other stakeholders. As a result, the Welenchiti TWU:

- *provides water supply systems for estimated 69,809 people⁴, two schools with Menstrual Health and Hygiene (MHH) facilities and closely works with 12 MHH clubs;*
- *monitors and technically supports Public Private Operators (PPOs) on both solid and liquid waste management;*
- *is involved in Natural Resource Management through planting trees jointly with the Agricultural Office;*
- *jointly works with the Micro Finance Office on the water kiosks and water point operators both in town and satellite villages and on bill collection;*
- *closely works with rural kebeles water committees.*



Figure 1: Women's group of PPOs managing solid waste in Welenchiti, Oromia region. © UNICEF Ethiopia/2020/LVerstraete

⁴ Population as reported by utilities in 2019 during ONEWASH Plus Programme implementation assessment.

BOX 3.

LEARNING ALLIANCE APPROACH FOR SMALL TOWN SANITATION

Under the Sustainable WASH Systems (SWS) Learning Partnership, TetraTech and IRC WASH have been supporting systems strengthening for sanitation in the small towns of Wolisso and Debre Birhan. The programme advocates for a move from focusing only on the full sanitation service chain (from capture to disposal of excreta) to a more holistic systems approach. This means taking into account the actors and factors involved in institutional, financial, advice, monitoring, technological, regulatory and capacity building issues related to sanitation service provision.

In order to do so, the SWS Learning Partnership has taken a Learning Alliance approach, facilitated by a “hub”, which supports the establishment of the learning alliance, the coordination of meetings and linking up of different actors in the towns, and provides targeted responses (e.g. training) to needs identified by the coalition.

Some concrete results of the approach have been:

- *Increased political (budgetary) commitment for sanitation;*
- *A published communal and public latrine management manual;*
- *Established and trained shared latrine facilities management body;*
- *Procured land for faecal sludge dumpsite and constructed faecal sludge dumping treatment facilities;*
- *Capacity built through targeted training (learning alliance members and community).*

BOX 4:

ITWU: A UTILITY SERVING REFUGEES AND HOST COMMUNITIES

The Itang Town Water Utility provides, as host community, water services to more than 190K refugees, as well as to the 30K people residing in the nearby host communities, a model piloted by UNICEF.

Having a large and reliable client as UNHCR was found to be beneficial for the utility and the host community. The refugees, through UNHCR, are the main contributors to the utility's income (93% in 2012 EC). Also, it provides job opportunities for the people from the host community. As such, it can be a peace building factor and can strengthen social cohesion between host communities and refugees.

The fact that the utility provides water services to the refugees is also more beneficial for UNHCR. The costs are much lower than water provided by tanker trucks or NGOs.

This does require clear institutional and accountability arrangements in which refugees are recognized and included, e.g. by being represented in the Water Board overseeing the utility.

The Itang 'refugee-host community integrated service delivery model' has been adopted as a model for the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) and is being replicated in Ethiopia and abroad.



Figure 2: Nyarang Nhial Nyuot,, 11, used to fetch water supplied by trucks which meant a two hour round trip on foot. © UNICEF Ethiopia/2019/ Nahom Tesfaye

Conclusion

There is a clear need for systems approaches, taking into account the different WASH sub-sectors (water, sanitation, hygiene) and related sectors (water resource management, climate change adaptation), and different WASH service users (households and communities, institutions, such as schools and health care facilities, and refugee camps). It showed the need for approaches that cover different systems components, or building blocks, such as infrastructure development and maintenance, finance, institutions and governance, coordination and learning.

Systems strengthening and change are ongoing processes which take time. It may require multiple levels of action, both at local (town) level, strengthening local systems, as well as at regional and national level, including strengthening financial systems (like the Water Resource Development Fund), regulatory systems (currently under discussion in the sector) and capacity building systems (e.g. the open university courses developed for small-town WASH under the ONEWASH Plus programme).

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UNICEF's water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) country teams work inclusively with governments, civil society partners and donors, to improve WASH services for children and adolescents, and the families and caregivers who support them. UNICEF works in over 100 countries worldwide to improve water and sanitation services, as well as basic hygiene practices. This publication is part of the UNICEF WASH Learning Series, designed to contribute to knowledge of good practice across UNICEF's WASH programming. In this series:

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